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Chairman: Mr. TSHERING (Bhutan)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.25 p.m.

AGENDA ITEM 112: HUMAN RIGHTS QUESTIONS (A/50/36)

1. Mr. AYALA LASSO (United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights) said that the collective vision of the United Nations of the future was that of an Organization reflecting the fact that all human beings were the true participants in the historical process and should be the direct beneficiaries of national and international policies and actions. At a time when the Organization was engaged in a process of self-criticism, the human rights programme must make every effort to respond to the vision of the future and successfully meet the challenges facing it. Human rights must play an essential role in the process of restoring peace and promoting reconciliation in the territory of the former Yugoslavia. Respect for human rights, guaranteed by the presence of a competent infrastructure throughout the area, was indispensable to ensure that the reconstruction effort achieved the desired results. The success of the operation would be linked to the implementation of an appropriate human rights programme.

2. His Office was prepared to assume an active role in that effort and the specific experience that it had acquired in the past three years in human rights operations in the territory of the former Yugoslavia as well as in other activities and technical cooperation programmes in the field would be very useful in that regard. The Office was ready to work in a spirit of cooperation with other United Nations agencies and regional and subregional organizations that had a mandate to carry out there.

3. He underscored the importance of initiating and maintaining a dialogue with Governments aimed at guaranteeing respect for human rights since personal and direct contact was an invaluable means of strengthening cooperation, gaining confidence and ensuring support. The visits that he had paid to a number of States had enabled him to conduct a dialogue on human rights at the highest political level, urging them to sign and ratify the human rights instruments in order to ensure the universality of internationally recognized standards. He had offered the cooperation and technical assistance of the Centre for Human Rights and other United Nations bodies to countries which requested them. Helping States in their own efforts to carry out their human rights programmes was an obligation of the world community.

4. During his visits he had also addressed the question of following up the decisions or recommendations of the Commission on Human Rights and other human rights agencies set up under different treaties. National human rights institutions, which had an important role to play in that regard, should be strengthened; where none existed they should be created. Academic and research centres and non-governmental organizations could also play an important role. In general, there had been a willingness to cooperate with the Office of the High Commissioner in search for positive solutions to human rights problems; however, his appeals had not always produced the desired results. A recent example was the case of Mr. Ken Saro-Wiwa and other political activists, who had been executed after a trial that had not conformed to the standards of international law.

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5. He wished to draw attention to a particularly important and inalienable human right, namely, the right to development. His Office had been working on an ambitious project aimed at sensitizing institutions and individuals concerned with economic and social development to the impact of economic and development policies on the enjoyment of human rights. The United Nations human rights programme should adopt a global approach geared to promoting the right to development. Appropriate action should be taken at the national, international and Secretariat levels. The Centre for Human Rights would be restructured so as to ensure proper recognition for the right to development. Many United Nations agencies and programmes, as well as a number of financial institutions, were already working to further the right to development, and it was important to strengthen cooperation with such institutions. The philosophy of the right to development was also a part of the cooperation programmes which his Office was carrying out in Rwanda.

6. Since the presentation of his last report to the General Assembly, his Office and the Centre for Human Rights had actively promoted the implementation of programmes of action related to the Decade for Human Rights Education, the International Decade of the World's Indigenous People, and the Third Decade to Combat Racism and Racial Discrimination. In connection with the Decade for Human Rights Education, he had recently asked all Heads of State to support the initiative by establishing national committees to work in the area of human rights education.

7. Another issue which had received a great deal of attention from his Office had been the promotion and protection of the rights of the child. He was happy to inform members that, with 181 ratifications of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, over 90 per cent of the world's children were protected by it. His Office had held consultations with the Committee on the Rights of the Child and with UNICEF, and had prepared a plan of action to increase substantive support for the Committee and obtain the necessary resources to apply its recommendations. In September 1995, he had addressed all States parties to the Convention requesting their support. The early responses, both from developed and developing countries, had been encouraging.

8. His Office and the Centre had played an active role at the Fourth World Conference on Women, held in Beijing in September 1995. His observations on the draft platform for action, both before and during the Conference, had given rise to many fruitful debates and had been reflected in the final document. His Office was prepared to promote the integration of the human rights of women in all activities of the United Nations system.

9. His Office had participated in a number of activities pertaining to early warning and preventive action in the field of human rights. Preventive action aimed at strengthening or preserving the rule of law and the very foundation of the State, in accordance with internationally accepted standards of human rights, could prevent crises and conflicts which often led to mass migrations of refugees and displaced persons.

10. Bearing in mind the important role played by national institutions in guaranteeing and encouraging human rights policies, he had recruited for his Office an expert who would be concerned mainly with the strengthening of

national human rights institutions. The legal framework created by international treaties for the promotion and protection of human rights had been strengthened, but the norms must be applied in a practical way and that could only be achieved when national mechanisms were available to redress abuses, punish guilty parties, and encourage authorities to adopt appropriate human rights policies. The development of such mechanisms should be a major priority for the near future. The new national institutions that his Office was helping to create would work not only in the area of civil and political rights, but also in the area of economic, social and cultural rights. They would also deal with special cases, such as those of the homeless, the mentally ill and the victims of development and underdevelopment.

11. It was encouraging to note that after the Vienna Conference, there had been an increase in the number of projects to promote and protect human rights carried out by United Nations agencies and programmes. There was a need, however, for greater cooperation and coordination among such programmes. All concerned must set aside their individual and institutional differences in order to accomplish a truly collective mission. That was the philosophy adopted by his Office at its inception.

12. Bearing in mind the complexity and broad scope of the mandate entrusted to his Office, he had worked actively to promote and disseminate the image and broaden the field of action of the institution of High Commissioner for Human Rights. He was pleased to note that his dialogue with Governments, non-governmental organizations and other groups and individuals devoted to the promotion and protection of human rights throughout the world was producing positive results. He was encouraged by the expressions of support he had received from the Movement of Non-aligned Countries, the Group of 7, the European Union, the Rio Group and others. It was still necessary, however, to strengthen the image and capacity for action of the Office of the High Commissioner, and he appealed to all States Members to cooperate to that end.

13. The restructuring of the Centre for Human Rights, which had begun in January 1995, would facilitate and strengthen promotion of the human rights programme of the United Nations. The restructuring process was based on the following considerations: (a) the Office of the High Commissioner and the Centre for Human Rights constituted a single unit for action; (b) the High Commissioner, as the United Nations official having the main responsibility for human rights activities, was responsible for strategic planning and policies aimed at developing, coordinating and facilitating human rights activities in the United Nations; (c) the Assistant-Secretary-General for Human Rights was under the authority of the High Commissioner, and acted as head of the Centre for Human Rights and as deputy to the High Commissioner; and (d) teamwork was essential to achieve the proposed objectives. The basic objective was to ensure the universal enjoyment of all human rights by putting into practice the will and determination of the world community as expressed by the United Nations. The internal phase of the restructuring of the Centre for Human Rights had been carried out between February and June 1995, and since July the Centre had been working with the consultant from Price Waterhouse Management. It had been reviewing its organizational structure and working methods. In October, two retreats, with the participation of the Assistant-Secretary-General for Human

Rights and high-ranking officials, had been held. During the retreats, eight areas of work needing improvement had been identified, and specific measures for effecting change had been agreed upon. The restructuring plan, which had been submitted to the Secretary-General, envisaged specific projects in the area of restructuring, management of financial resources, management of human resources, management of information and management of relations with associated agencies. A plan for the operational structure of the Centre had also been developed. Activities would be regrouped under five branches with well-defined responsibilities. One branch would be responsible for gathering and analysing information for use by the other branches; the second would provide technical support to the implementation of conventions; the third would deal with special procedures; the fourth would work in the area of advisory services and technical assistance, and the fifth would deal with field activities. They would all be supported by a substantially strengthened administration. An advisory board, chaired by the High Commissioner and made up of the Assistant-Secretary-General for Human Rights, the senior officials of the Office of the High Commissioner, the branch chiefs and others, would work closely with him. Another would coordinate daily activities.

14. The plan for change represented a specific response to the concerns expressed in a recent report on the operation of the Centre. It also took into account the new responsibilities assigned to the United Nations. Approval of the budget for the biennium 1996-1997 was essential to the restructuring process. He appealed to all Member States to lend their full support to the proposals presented by the Secretary-General, which included a modest increase in resources for the Office of the High Commissioner and the Centre for Human Rights. The Office of the High Commissioner belonged to each and every Member State of the United Nations, and all had the duty to contribute to its success. In 1998, the international community would be celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. All Members should work together to ensure that the promotion and protection of human rights became a reality in the daily life of all societies and individuals.

15. Mr. RODRIGUEZ (Spain), speaking on behalf of the European Union, commended the High Commissioner for the efforts he had made to carry out his mandate in numerous areas. He noted with satisfaction that the High Commissioner had stressed the importance of the protection and promotion of human rights in efforts to reach a peaceful settlement in the former Yugoslavia. His delegation would like to know how the High Commissioner saw the role of human rights activities in that context and the part to be played by the Office in the humanitarian and human rights field in the former Yugoslavia.

16. Information on the field operations to be conducted in Rwanda in the next few months would also be appreciated. In that connection, he stressed that the European Union supported the funding of such operations as outlined in the proposed programme budget for the biennium 1996-1997. Lastly, it would be interesting to know whether a general policy had been developed in accordance with the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action and the Beijing Platform for Action, specifically with regard to the question of violence against women.

17. Mr. JUNEJO (Pakistan) commended the High Commissioner for the impartial manner in which he had reported on his activities over the past year. Pakistan

was particularly interested in the emphasis that he had given to implementation of the right to development, which had been recognized as a fundamental and inalienable human right. His country welcomed the ideas for promoting implementation of that right through the involvement of various organizations, including the international financial institutions, and the restructuring of the Centre for Human Rights.

18. The Office was being deluged with various mandates and was not always given sufficient resources to carry them out. That imbalance needed to be addressed. Paragraph 31 of the report of the High Commissioner (A/50/36) referred to his visit to India from 30 April to 6 May 1995 and to Jammu and Kashmir from 2 to 4 May, which had enabled him to see the atmosphere of violence that prevailed. The High Commissioner stressed that there was a specific obligation on the part of the Government to ensure the promotion and protection of human rights and to take the necessary measures to limit and punish abuses by those individuals who should enforce the law. Pakistan would like to know how the High Commissioner intended to follow up those visits.

19. Mr. AGGREY (Ghana) commended the excellent work carried out by the High Commissioner and the impartial manner in which he balanced issues relating to civil and political rights and questions concerning economic, social and cultural rights. The issue of human rights was no longer the monopoly of a group of countries, but was a matter of interest to all mankind. His delegation hoped that the Office would be provided with the necessary resources to carry out its work effectively and wished to know whether the report submitted to the Secretary-General on the restructuring of the Centre for Human Rights would be issued as a general document.

20. Mr. AYALA LASSO (United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights) said that activities in the field would play an increasingly important role in the Organization's overall work to promote and protect human rights. Maintaining direct contact was the best way to cooperate with Governments and achieve permanent results. The Office was prepared to work in the former Yugoslavia in all areas where its contribution would be useful and did not wish to compete with any other agencies or bodies in that regard. The case of Rwanda was a very difficult one. Operations to promote and protect human rights in that country had been financed through voluntary contributions, which had placed the programme in a very unstable situation, and must be avoided. Accordingly, he had requested that those operations should be financed through the regular budget of the United Nations and hoped that that request would be supported by delegations so that the Office could plan its activities and carry them out more effectively. At recent high-level forums on human rights held in New York in October, the participants had expressed their views on measures to be adopted and general policies to be followed, stressing that all the relevant United Nations agencies should integrate the concept of the human rights of women into their activities and that it was necessary to provide those agencies with the appropriate resources to do so. There was also a need to combat traditional practices that affected the health of women and the enjoyment of human rights.

21. Violence against women existed within families, societies and State institutions. The epidemic of violence against women must be dealt with and the Office was determined to assume its responsibility in promoting and protecting

the rights of women and hoped that Member States would support it in that effort.

22. The right to development was one of the most important rights to be recognized in the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action. The Office had decided to give that matter all the necessary attention in order to comply with that mandate. One of the branches of the Centre for Human Rights would deal specifically with the question of implementing the right to development. He had been in contact with financial organizations in that regard and had received encouraging responses from them. It was hoped that specific results would be achieved in that connection in the work to be carried out in 1996. The recommendations of the Working Group on the Right to Development would be followed up in order to contribute effectively to the implementation of that right.

23. He agreed that new mandates should be matched with new resources. Although the Office would not fail to act even if further funds were not forthcoming, its effectiveness depended on an appropriate level of human and financial resources. He was following up all his visits to the countries in question. Dialogue must be pursued through continuing contacts with Governments. In the case of India, and all the other countries that he had visited, he was maintaining an open dialogue and actively pursuing the various issues raised. He had recently received a visit from the President of the National Human Rights Commission of India and was gratified to learn about the progress made by the Commission in the promotion and protection of human rights in that country. Lastly, a document would be circulated in the near future to delegations on the restructuring of the Centre for Human Rights. The restructuring process had begun, and 63 steps would be taken in five different programmes on the basis of a clear timetable for action. It was hoped that the restructuring of the Centre would be completed by the end of 1996.

24. Ms. MURUGESAN (India) said that the Office had an important role to play in promoting human rights throughout the world. Accordingly, her Government had been happy to invite the High Commissioner to India and was confident that the Office would carry out its mandate in an impartial manner. She commended the High Commissioner for the work begun in promoting the right to development, which should lead to a programmatic follow-up to the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action. India also supported the technical assistance programmes conducted by the Centre for Human Rights, particularly in the field of human rights education. Human rights mandates must be matched with the resources necessary to carry them out. Lastly, she stressed that all aspects of human rights violations by all parties should be addressed. Her Government would continue to cooperate with the High Commissioner in the follow-up to his visit to India.

25. Mr. SABOIA (Brazil) said that his delegation was encouraged by the work of the High Commissioner in promoting peace in various emergency situations and conflicts and stressed the importance of activities based on a longer-term and preventive approach to assisting countries trying to improve the implementation of human rights. His delegation underscored the importance of promoting the right to development and requested further information on the advisory services and technical cooperation activities of the Centre for Human Rights. It was

encouraging to learn about the restructuring of the Centre, whose activities must be managed and coordinated more effectively in view of the new activities in the field of human rights.

26. Mr. ZAINODDIN (Islamic Republic of Iran) said that the regional arrangements relating to human rights did much to promote and protect human rights throughout the world and that budgetary considerations should not affect the holding of seminars and workshops in that field. He requested the High Commissioner to indicate whether the seminar on regional arrangements in the Asian and Pacific region to be held in Nepal later in 1995 would take place and whether the lack of resources would affect the visit by the High Commissioner to his country.

27. Mr. AYALA LASSO (United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights) said that he would always be impartial in order to ensure respect for the Office and enable it to carry out its mandate effectively. He had been following the situation in India in close contact with the Government and would continue to do so. The advisory services and technical cooperation programmes were most important not only to maintain the rule of law but also to strengthen the legislative measures in countries requesting such cooperation. Technical cooperation programmes focused on specific areas, such as restructuring the judiciary, reforming the police force and providing human rights education. The Centre had received many requests from States for technical cooperation programmes. Although approximately $6 million were needed to meet all such requests, the Office had only approximately $2.5 million at its disposal for that purpose. In that connection, he stressed the need for transparency in the management of the resources provided and said that reports would be submitted with all the necessary information for the donor States. Lastly, he informed the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran that, owing to budgetary restrictions arising from the financial crisis, the holding of the seminar in question had been postponed and would take place in Nepal at the beginning of 1996. He was grateful to the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran for the invitation to visit that country, which he had already accepted, and he hoped that a mutually acceptable date for the visit would be set for 1996.

28. Mrs. BOUKHCHINA (Tunisia) said that her country had undertaken great development efforts since independence, supported by the establishment of democracy in 1987. Children and young people represented two thirds of the population of her country, while 45 per cent of it was under 20 years of age. Her country had concentrated its efforts on providing for that group, and devoted a large part of the State budget to it. The State Constitution guaranteed equal rights to all citizens, but additional legislation had been passed to protect the rights of the child, the latest of which was the law for the protection of the child which had been passed by the National Assembly in late 1995. That law provided extensive protection and guarantees for the protection of the rights of the child in every sphere. She noted that Tunisia was the fifth country in the world to enact a comprehensive law to protect children. Since 1956, family life had been regulated by the law of personal status, which was being continually updated. It had most recently been updated in 1993. That law forbade polygamy, regularized divorce, provided for joint responsibility and mutual respect between married couples and gave the mother guardianship in the case of abandonment by or the death of the father. Tunisian

law obliged fathers to continue to support their male children until they reached maturity or until they had completed their studies, and to remain responsible for girl children until they obtained a source of income.

29. Tunisian children were provided with comprehensive health care. A vaccination rate of 98 per cent had been achieved, and infant mortality had been greatly reduced in the past 10 years. The provision of clean drinking water contributed to the health of the child, and had been achieved in 100 per cent of city houses and 80 per cent of houses in the country.

30. Education was free at all levels. Many training opportunities were offered to young people in order to prepare them for the labour market. Such training was free and available in all parts of the country. It was against the law to employ children under 15 years of age, when basic education would be completed. Children's rights were further protected between the ages of 15 and 18, their employment in any dangerous activity being outlawed. All those provisions were supported by a large body of legislation. Tunisian law provided for absolute equality between male and female in every sphere. The Tunisian child was also fully provided with recreational, cultural and sporting facilities in all parts of the country, and supported by numerous child and youth organizations. Tunisia was a country which valued peace, harmony and cooperation between States, as was demonstrated by the participation of its troops in several peace-keeping operations in numerous areas. It wished to participate, with the international community, in establishing a peaceful and secure environment for every child.

31. Mr. MIHUT (Romania) said that the large number of States which had ratified or acceded to the Convention on the Rights of the Child showed that the international community was closer than ever to the universal ratification of a human rights instrument; his delegation urged the remaining States to become parties to the Convention. The latter spelt out children's rights in a comprehensive manner, but there were other legal aspects which needed to be addressed by Member States, such as the drafting of an optional protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflicts.

32. His delegation shared the view that the membership of the Committee on the Rights of the Child should be increased. Such an increase would better reflect the willingness of States to participate in its work and to exchange views on the specific problems facing children throughout the world. Romania also fully supported the positions reflected in the recent European Union statement regarding child labour, child prostitution and pornography, street children, and issues concerning the girl child.

33. The high incidence of "private adoptions" of children was a major cause for concern. Such arrangements generally precluded the adequate preparation of the child and the prospective parents. Legal decisions in that respect should be focused entirely on the interests of the child, and inter-country adoptions should take place through specialized agencies with legal experience and the capacity for follow-up. The problems encountered by Romania in 1990 and 1991 in that respect had led to the establishment of the Romanian National Committee for Adoption, a governmental body coordinating activities and policies; any international adoption involving a child of Romanian nationality could be

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undertaken only through that Committee, and subject to a protection framework which avoided mercantile practices.

34. Another governmental body, the National Committee for Child Protection, had been established in 1993, to elaborate strategies and programmes to improve children's living conditions and to monitor the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child in Romania. It had elaborated the National Plan of Action for Children, focusing attention on children's rights; their health, growth, development, and education; the family as the best environment for children's development; women's role in society and improvement of children's living conditions, and a legislative and administrative framework. The Plan had been given legal force by the Romanian Government and, most recently, a bill had been passed for the social protection of minors in difficulty and in conflict with the law.

35. Mr. JUNEJO (Pakistan) said that the last decade of the twentieth century should be seen as a watershed in the struggle to achieve recognition for children's rights. The almost universal acceptance of the Convention provided a favourable environment for the promotion of those rights. However, the survival, protection and development of children were threatened in varying degrees in many parts of the world. Causes of the violation of their rights included high rates of maternal and infant mortality, malnutrition, and lack of adequate health care, educational facilities and opportunities for full development. The girl child was particularly vulnerable to neglect, abuse and exploitation. Widespread poverty forced many parents to send their children to work instead of to school. Millions of children were refugees, and they were the most vulnerable. In the recent past, hundreds of thousands of children had died in civil wars and other conflicts. In other instances, unscrupulous groups and individuals subjected children to gross abuse and exploitation.

36. The international community must intensify its efforts to protect the rights of children. In the sphere of advocacy of those rights, the United Nations Children's Fund had made impressive progress. That momentum must be maintained, to protect children from existing dangers and from new, sinister forms of exploitation. His delegation commended the report of the Special Rapporteur on the subject of the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography, and supported the idea of a partnership of education, justice and the media for the protection of children. However, more direct and forceful intervention strategies should be explored, and there was no mention in the report of the depiction in the media of crime, violence and sex, which pushed victims towards criminality and substance abuse. Also, the international community should actively support national efforts at the stages of prevention, intervention and rehabilitation.

37. In the past decade, two million children had lost their lives in conflicts. They were often deliberately targeted by aggressors in complete violation of international humanitarian law. Hundreds of thousands of innocent children had died in Bosnia and Herzegovina, in Rwanda, in Somalia, and in Jammu and Kashmir. Those who survived suffered sexual abuse, exploitation, torture and other forms of violence and neglect, as had been reported by the High Commissioner. Children who had not reached the age of 18 should be fully protected from military recruitment and participation in hostilities. He urged the

Secretary-General to intervene more boldly to protect children; such intervention should be both symbolic and substantive.

38. Pakistan had been one of the co-initiators of the World Summit for Children, and had ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1990. National laws were being reformed to accord with the convention; legislation on child labour and abuse of children was being implemented. Full protection of the rights of the child was given top priority, and crimes against children were punishable with severe penalties, including capital punishment.

39. The problem of child labour was a widespread plague, and was largely due to the backward economic conditions found in many countries. When poor families increased their participation in the labour force, the additional work effort came from women and children. Strong legislative measures, socio-economic reforms, education, and economic growth were required to eliminate child labour.

40. The Constitution of Pakistan prohibited slavery in any form; the debt bondage and bonded labour system had been abolished, and the engagement of children in hazardous employment was also forbidden. In order to eradicate bonded labour, the Government was adopting further measures to implement relevant laws and to prosecute the culprits. In order to identify areas of concentration of child labour, a survey and qualitative analysis of the issue were to be carried out. The Ministry of Social Welfare had prepared a programme for the rehabilitation of child workers, to provide education, health care, nutrition and vocational training, and a similar programme existed for children working at brick kilns, automobile workshops and in domestic service. A project was being finalized to provide shelter, educational and vocational facilities to destitute children. A draft Child Offenders Act had been introduced, banning the use of the death sentence and of whipping for juvenile offenders, and providing for their rehabilitation.

41. Slow economic growth and cuts in social spending had significant implications for the survival and development of children, and full collaboration in political, policy and planning areas would be required to overcome such problems. Recent studies suggested that Pakistan would have to spend about 18 per cent of its gross domestic product to achieve schooling for all. However, certain specific goals would be attained within the current decade, including the elimination of guinea-worm disease and poliomyelitis. The broader social action programme included family planning, basic health care, rural water supply and sanitation. Top priority was being given to the massive spread of primary education and to the increased enrolment of girls.

42. The neglect, abuse and exploitation of children, who represented the future of humanity, could shatter the dream of a world based on the firm foundation of peace and security. Healthy, educated, protected and secure children were needed for a prosperous and harmonious future.

43. Mr. PEDRAZA (Bolivia), speaking on agenda item 111, said that the issue of indigenous peoples was extremely important for Bolivia, since a large proportion of its population was descended from the indigenous groups of the Amazon. Bolivia had been one of the first countries to ratify ILO Convention No. 169, and much of the country's domestic legislation was adapted to the furtherance

and protection of indigenous rights. The Constitution defined Bolivia as a multi-ethnic and multicultural State. New laws had been created in order to involve indigenous groups in decisions which affected them and introduce bilingual education, which enabled children to learn to read and write in their own languages, thereby maintaining their values and traditions, and to learn other languages at a later stage. Legislative reforms oriented towards the needs of indigenous groups would also be implemented in the areas of land ownership, forestry resources, and the environment.

44. The situation of indigenous peoples world wide was difficult. The International Decade of the World's Indigenous People was an important contribution to solving the problems facing them in areas such as human rights, the environment, development, education and health. Appropriate steps must be taken to ensure the participation of indigenous peoples and organizations in the work and the activities of the Decade. His Government would play an active part in those activities; a number of workshops and seminars had already taken place in Bolivia in 1994 and 1995, and a National Committee for the International Decade of the World's Indigenous People, made up of representatives of the Government and of indigenous organizations, had been established under the chairmanship of the Vice-President of the Republic.

45. The Fourth World Conference on Women had given women in indigenous communities an opportunity to increase world-wide awareness of their situation. Bolivia would continue its endeavours to improve the social, economic and political situation of those communities, which made up a majority of its population. His delegation invited international financial organizations and developed countries to increase their contribution to that essential task.

46. Mrs. ESPINOSA (Mexico), speaking on agenda item 110, said that the well-being, development and survival of children should be a central objective for any country aspiring to achieve full development. The future of each nation depended on the care and attention it gave to its children.

47. Mexico had a long tradition of caring for children; it had been one of the first States to ratify the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and it had been active in bringing about the World Summit for Children in 1990, which had established clear objectives for the year 2000. The Summit had produced what some had called the most important programmes in the history of child health, containing ambitious goals which had been viewed with caution even by the most optimistic. Mexico had succeeded in attaining many of those goals ahead of schedule. Poliomyelitis had been eradicated, deaths from dysentery among children under five years of age had been more than halved, and deaths from acute respiratory infections among the same age group had fallen by more than one third. Measles had almost completely disappeared, and neonatal tetanus had been substantially reduced. Major progress had also been made in literacy and education.

48. Despite those achievements, much remained to be done in areas such as child health, maternal mortality, and assistance to those in extreme difficulty, such as street children. Regular meetings under the chairmanship of the President of Mexico were held in order to assess the attainment of the Summit objectives. At the latest meeting, attended by the Executive Director of the United Nations

Children's Fund, the Government had presented its National Programme of Action for Children for 1995-2000. The Government was determined to fulfil the commitments undertaken at the Summit, as well as its commitment to all the children of Mexico.

49. The very high number of States which had ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child was encouraging. She hoped that those which had not done so would give the matter urgent consideration. The universality of the Convention would be an unequivocal testimony to the international community's commitment to the rights of the child. In the coming year, the States parties should concentrate on strengthening the Convention and taking the necessary measures to deal with the widespread suffering of children as a result of armed conflicts, the sale of children, and child prostitution and pornography.

50. The results of the Summit and the Convention constituted the essential framework for the consideration of agenda item 110. The attainment of the goals of the Summit and the full implementation of the provisions of the Convention would undeniably alleviate the situation of millions of the world's children. Childhood should be a time for play, enjoyment, and intellectual development, for discovering human values, and for living free from oppression, suffering or shortages, with full access to health care, education and food. The international community must redouble its efforts to enable children everywhere to live in conditions of equity and social justice.

51. Mrs. BARISH (Costa Rica) said that her delegation was pleased to note that the number of States parties to the Convention on the Rights of the Child had increased to 181. She urged those States that were still not parties to ratify it as soon as possible. As the Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights had indicated, the efforts of Member States should now be directed towards achieving a better interpretation of the provisions of the Convention so as to ensure that it would be applied in the daily life of children throughout the world. In Costa Rica, the Office of the Ombudsman now had a division devoted to the protection of children. Since 1982, the international community and the United Nations, working through the various fora and agencies entrusted with the protection of human rights, had been concerned about the precarious and tragic situation of children who were victims of all types of abuse and discrimination. In that regard, she wished to pay tribute to Mr. Vitit Muntarbhorn, the first Special Rapporteur of the Commission on Human Rights on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography. Mrs. Ofelia Calcetas-Santos, the new Special Rapporteur, had also performed her duties with great professionalism and sensitivity, as evidenced in her report (A/50/456). The Costa Rican delegation agreed with the Special Rapporteur that the educational system, the judicial system and the media had an important role to play in preventing the situations analysed by the report. In that connection, it was worth recalling that 1995 marked the beginning of the Decade for Human Rights Education. Those three elements, when properly coordinated, could have a positive impact on efforts to protect children.

52. Her delegation noted with satisfaction the report submitted by the Executive Director of UNICEF, an agency that had gone through many changes, but which continued to give priority to its work on behalf of children. Costa Rica had, on different occasions, participated as a member of the Executive Board of

UNICEF. At the end of 1995, her Government would be concluding its current term on the Board. Nevertheless, it would continue to participate as an observer, particularly in 1996, when it would preside over the Group of 77 and China.

53. The report by Ms. Graça Machel, the expert responsible for the study on the impact on children of armed conflict, revealed the tragic and complex situation of those children. Her delegation agreed that landmines should be destroyed, and their use, manufacture and sale should be prohibited. Her delegation supported the omnibus resolution on the rights of the child, and had decided to sponsor it through the Group of Latin American and Caribbean States, represented by Bolivia.

54. In conclusion, she said that her delegation wished to express its satisfaction at the announcement made by the Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights to the effect that the Conference of States Parties to the Convention on the Rights of the Child would be held on 12 December, for the purpose of considering the amendment proposed by Costa Rica to article 43(2) of the Convention. The amendment was aimed at increasing from 10 to 18 the number of experts on the Committee on the Rights of the Child. She urged all States parties to the Convention to attend the Conference in order to ensure that there was a quorum to consider the proposal.

55. Mr. MERIAN (Syrian Arab Republic) said he had been alarmed at the reports of the increase in the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography in many countries. His country strongly condemned such crimes, and found it inconceivable that an international campaign had not been undertaken to eradicate them. The Syrian Arab Republic made every effort at all levels to protect children and promote their welfare. Children were fully provided with health, educational, cultural, recreational and social services. Child welfare and protection were the main focus of Syrian family life.

56. Great importance was attached to the education of children. The 1981 Act on Universal Education made education mandatory between the ages of 6 and 15. Education was free at all levels.

57. The State also paid special attention to juvenile delinquents, and had provided many institutions for their rehabilitation. Children were protected from all forms of economic exploitation and from being employed before reaching working age.

58. As a result of the Israeli occupation of the Syrian Arab Golan, tens of thousands of Syrians had been forced to leave their land and move elsewhere in Syria. The main victims of that displacement had been women and children, who suffered from the ensuing poverty, disease and deprivation, although the Government made every effort to provide them with the means of subsistence. Children living under the yoke of Israeli occupation suffered from the effects of occupation and terrorism. Their educational, psychological and social welfare was in jeopardy. Israel had deliberately changed school curricula to obliterate their Arab cultural identity. Israel also closed schools and prevented students from continuing their education, thereby violating fundamental human rights, as well as the international conventions that regulated and safeguarded the rights of civilians under occupation.

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59. The Syrian Arab Republic had ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1993, and incorporated its provisions into national legislation. A national committee had been established with representatives from many ministries, other bodies and non-governmental organizations. That committee had prepared a national report on the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Syria enjoyed fruitful relations with many United Nations agencies and bodies, and looked forward to increasing its cooperation with those organizations in order to promote and protect the rights of children.

60. Mr. RÖNQUIST (Sweden), speaking on behalf of the Nordic countries, said he wished to focus on two of the objectives contained in the programme of activities of the International Decade of the World's Indigenous People (A/50/511): to give consideration to the establishment of a permanent forum for indigenous people in the United Nations system; and to adopt a declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples and to further develop international standards as well as national legislation for the protection and promotion of the human rights of indigenous people, including effective means of monitoring and guaranteeing those rights.

61. The Nordic countries had stressed the importance of indigenous participation in the standard-setting stage of the draft declaration. They considered that all non-governmental organizations with an interest in that work should be given the right to participate. The Nordic countries had expressed deep concern in various international fora with regard to the situation of indigenous people world wide. It was unacceptable that many were unable to enjoy their human rights and fundamental freedoms, and it was essential that the international community should be aware of that, in order to make every effort to secure the enjoyment of those rights for indigenous people.

62. Solutions to the problems faced by indigenous people must be worked out with their full participation and on the basis of full respect for their human, civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights and identity. The planning and implementation of national and international policies and programmes must be carried out with full respect for the interests of indigenous people. He recalled the commitment in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (A/CONF.177/L.1, para. 256 (a)) to integrate the perspectives and knowledge of all women, including indigenous women, on sustainable resource management in the development of policies and programmes for sustainable development. He also wished to stress the commitments entered into by Governments in the Declaration of the World Summit for Social Development to recognize and respect the right of indigenous people to maintain and develop their identity, culture and interests, support their aspirations for social justice and provide an environment that enables them to participate in the social, economic and political life of their country (A/CONF.166/9, commitment 4(f)).

63. The standards on indigenous rights to be elaborated by the Working Group of the Commission on Human Rights should promote peaceful and constructive solutions based on the principles of multicultural societies, inter-ethnic understanding and harmony and tolerance. Respect for the rights of indigenous people did not prejudice the territorial integrity of States, but strengthened it and prevented violent conflicts. There were many different options for the

provision of self-government or other decentralization arrangements, which could be adapted to suit the conditions specific to each State. Different approaches had been adopted by the various Nordic countries in dealing with their indigenous people. Greenland was an autonomous part of the Kingdom of Denmark. It was represented by two members in the Danish Parliament, and the majority of its domestic policies were the responsibility of the Greenland Home Rule Government. In Norway, Sweden and Finland members of the Sami population were elected to the Sami Assemblies in order to ensure that Sami interests were taken into consideration, and to promote and nurture a living Sami culture.

64. The Nordic countries all shared the stated goals of the International Decade of the World's Indigenous People, and believed that indigenous people and the non-governmental organizations working with them should be closely involved in the planning, implementation and evaluation of activities for the Decade. Some Nordic countries had established national committees to plan activities related to the Decade and to increase the knowledge and understanding of the culture of different indigenous peoples living in the region.

65. Transparency and involvement were the key elements in establishing a permanent forum for indigenous people. The Nordic countries had suggested that a comprehensive review should be undertaken of the activities of different United Nations bodies of interest to indigenous people, and recommended the organization by the Centre for Human Rights of a second workshop to discuss the modalities for a permanent forum for indigenous people.

66. Mrs. KABA (Côte d'Ivoire) said that in order to promote and protect the rights of the child, it was first necessary to understand the causes of the deterioration in the living conditions of children. The main cause was the extreme poverty in which their families lived, but additional factors were the disintegration of families, the decline in moral and spiritual values and the sex and violence widespread in modern societies. Appropriate conditions must be created to enable poor families to ensure that their children both survived and developed their potential. The World Summit for Social Development had stressed the need for the international community to take measures to eradicate poverty at all levels. That presupposed the creation of jobs in poor countries, new and additional resources and economic and social infrastructures which would break the vicious cycle of poverty. It would also be necessary to pardon the debts of heavily indebted developing countries, thereby freeing resources to create a safety net which would give poor families the chance to escape from such abject poverty.

67. In any discussion of the protection of children, it was important to stress the strengthening of the family. Mothers were increasingly becoming the heads of families, and needed the support of the State or community in which they lived in order to ensure the survival and education of their children. Religious leaders should encourage members of their communities to assume their family responsibilities, and should try to reverse the decline in moral and spiritual values.

68. Societies were also threatened by sex and violence. While the freedom of the press should be respected, codes of conduct and professional directives should be adopted in order to prevent the media from becoming a vehicle for the

moral degradation of children. The media should instead promote positive and worth while values.

69. Action was urgently needed to ensure that the warring parties in armed conflicts no longer enlisted children under 18 years of age. Protection for children in times of war, unaccompanied refugee children, the growing number of children orphaned by war or AIDS were all problems which deserved the special attention of governmental and non-governmental human rights organizations. The population of street children in large cities was growing daily. Such children were exploited and abused and forced into a life of crime in order to survive. They were the victims of the society which had denied their human rights, and needed extensive support and rehabilitation.

70. Her delegation welcomed the measures taken by the European Parliament to outlaw the trade in organs for transplants and appealed to other developed countries to take similar action. It was a matter of supply and demand, as with drugs, and if there was no demand there would be no supply, and innocent lives would be saved. Sexual tourism should also be strongly condemned by the international community, and the World Tourism Organization should impose penalties on States which encouraged vile practices in order to attract tourists.

71. She particularly wished to plead the cause of girl children who were often subject to particular discriminatory treatment. It would be appropriate to plan an international day of the girl child in order to raise awareness in the international community of the fate of girl children in many countries, combat discriminatory practices and promote equality of rights between girls and boys.

The meeting rose at 6.17 p.m.